



Tampa Bay Skeptics

REPORT

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• skeptic (n): a person who searches for truth through questioning and reasoning •

“Psychic/Prophet” fails the TBS “\$1,000 Challenge”

by Gary P. Posner

On September 19, at the appointed hour and not a moment sooner (thus leading to some momentary trepidation), Titusville’s self-styled “psychic/prophet” Virginia Levy arrived at the downtown Tampa Main Public Library to demonstrate one of her paranormal abilities for the TBS “\$1,000 Challenge.” Witnesses present in the auditorium included members of TBS, a reporter for the *Tampa Tribune*, several students from the University of South Florida, and Levy’s young daughter. And just as we at TBS had predicted, Levy failed to demonstrate any evidence of her alleged powers.

The controlled test of “psychometry” (reading the vibrations of objects) involved locating the box into which, moments earlier, she had placed her own object (a tiny “crystal stone”). Ten small cardboard jewelry boxes were placed before her, one of which contained the stone, the rest empty. The boxes had been mixed such that no one in the room could possibly know which contained the stone, unless the person possessed “psychic” power.

To facilitate her reading of the vibrations of their contents, Levy was permitted to place her hands near, and even touch (without rattling) the boxes. Once she made her selection, that box was so marked, all ten boxes were placed securely aside (still closed), and a second run was performed with another stone and set of boxes. The results would not be revealed until the completion of the final run.

In all, seven such runs were conducted, with the probability of success in any given run being 1:10 without benefit of “psychic” power. The probability of being correct all seven times by chance were 1:10,000,000 (1:10 to the 7th power) and, as per the “Challenge” protocol signed by Levy and TBS, Levy was required to succeed all seven times in order to win.

During most of the runs, Levy did not get within a foot or more of the boxes as she psychically scanned them. She chatted and joked throughout much of the test, and at one point professed that, regardless of the results, she would leave the auditorium just as confident of her “psychic” powers as before.

After the final run was concluded, *Tribune* reporter Sean Ledig, who had earlier been mutually agreed upon to hold TBS’s \$1,000 check (which he would have handed over to Levy had she succeeded), was also tapped to open

the boxes. In the first run, Levy had selected box #6. As Ledig opened the boxes one by one, the stone was ultimately found to be in box #10. Although Levy had already lost the Challenge at that point, the results of the rest of the runs were also divulged. Levy turned out to have selected the wrong box all seven times.

Levy’s zero-for-seven performance was the second most likely outcome in the absence of “psychic” power. Given seven trials to succeed at a 1:10 task, the most likely chance result would be one correct guess (0.7 to be mathematically precise). Next most likely would be zero correct (the whole number next closest to 0.7). Progressively unlikely would be two, three, four, and so on.

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UFOs, Scientists and Stanford University

by Terry A. Smiljanich (Part 2)

In our last issue, we examined the recent Stanford/Sturrock report on the need for further serious study of the “UFO problem.” The study, heavily reported in the media as objective scientific confirmation of the reality of UFOs, was sponsored by the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE) and published in its “peer-reviewed” journal, the *Journal of Scientific Exploration (JSE)*. We learned that *JSE* has published many articles on such fringe-science topics as cold fusion, astrology, dowsing, faith healing, and the Loch Ness monster.

Far from being an objective scientific report published in a serious scientific journal, it thus turns out that the sponsoring organization and its publications are committed to the study of pseudoscientific topics, including UFOs. Unfortunately, in none of the media reports on this study was this important fact mentioned.

If there was any doubt about where the Society for Scientific Exploration stands on anti-rational thinking, one need only read some articles by Bernhard Haisch, the editor-in-chief of *JSE*. In “Be Skeptical of the ‘Skeptics,’” Dr. Haisch (Astronomy, University of Wisconsin) tut-tuts over the ridicule and innuendo coming from the “skeptical community.” He argues that it would only take a small part of the federal civilian research budget to “make pro-

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TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS Statement of Purpose and "\$1,000 Challenge"

Tampa Bay Skeptics, Inc., is a nonprofit educational and scientific organization devoted to the critical examination of paranormal and fringe-science claims. TBS does not reject claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective and critical inquiry. We share the philosophy of the international Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and with other local groups like TBS throughout the United States and the world, although TBS is an autonomous group not formally affiliated with CSICOP or with any other organization.

TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" is open to anyone claiming verifiable scientific proof of the reality of ESP, UFOs, dowsing, astrology, or any paranormal phenomenon. Please contact us for complete details.

Tampa Bay Skeptics Report is published quarterly. We welcome news clippings, and articles and letters for publication (subject to editing for length, clarity, and taste), and solicit opposing views. Please submit by e-mail or on a 3 1/2" diskette (in Mac or text/ASCII format).

Views expressed in articles and letters are those of the author(s), and not necessarily those of Tampa Bay Skeptics.

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS REPORT

Founded in 1988

1113 Normandy Trace Road
Tampa, Florida 33602-5771
Phone/Fax: (813) 221-3533

E-mail: garypos@aol.com

Web: <http://members.aol.com/tbayskept/tbs.html>

Founder and Editor:
Gary P. Posner

Membership Officer:
Valerie Grey

Cartoonist:
Don Addis

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Skeptical scientist defends against lawsuit brought by controversial clinic

by Robert H. Buesing

On October 9, a message was left on the Tampa Bay Skeptics' answering machine by Dr. Philip Filner, a biochemist with the Macular Degeneration Foundation. Filner stated that he was the subject of a libel action relating to his comments about RheoTherapy Centers of Tampa Bay, a Largo clinic offering a controversial therapy for a condition known as age-related macular degeneration (AMD). He added that he was calling TBS because his efforts to find an attorney qualified to take the case had thus far been in vain.

By the following afternoon, Gary Posner (whose answering machine doubles as TBS's) had issued an e-mail appeal to a couple of TBS members who also happen to be trial attorneys. I immediately gave Dr. Filner a call.

It turns out that Dr. Filner donates his time and expertise to the non-profit Macular Degeneration Foundation (MDF), which operates a popular website (www.eyesight.org) and provides, at no charge, information and support to sufferers of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and their families. AMD is a progressive eye disease and the leading cause of blindness among people over the age of 65. The disease damages the macula, the central portion of the retina responsible for central vision and color detection. While the cause of AMD is not completely understood, patients initially experience distorted central vision with blank patches, and eventually lose their central vision such that they cannot see directly in front of them.

According to MDF, while various treatment approaches have been attempted, upon rigorous review, about 90% of AMD cases fail to respond to any of them. As a result, there are a large number of AMD sufferers looking for a miracle, breakthrough cure. And RheoTherapy Centers offers just such a hope, with its newspaper advertisements containing such testimonials as, "It's like someone cleaned my eyeball" and "I know only God can make a miracle, but this is as close to a miracle as man can get."

The lawsuit alleges that Filner libeled RheoTherapy Centers in some of his e-mail replies to persons requesting information about the use of apheresis (dubbed "RheoTherapy" by the center). The center alleges that by inserting IV lines into the patient and circulating blood through a filter, high-molecular-weight proteins are removed, which in turn is supposed to relieve AMD symptoms. Using apheresis is a legitimate technique for certain conditions, but MDF believes that there is no peer-reviewed scientific support for the role of high-molecular-weight proteins in AMD or the effectiveness of apheresis in its treatment.

Dr. Richard C. Davis, Jr., founder of RheoTherapy Centers, discovered that some small studies testing the effectiveness of apheresis for AMD had been conducted at the University of Cologne (Germany). Davis subsequently opened his private, profit-making clinic and charges about \$2,000 per treatment. He recommends 7 to 10 treatments the first year, and 1 or 2 "booster" treatments each year thereafter. MDF's independent review of the Cologne studies found that they provided no proof of significant short-term improvement, or of any long-term improvement, in AMD patients treated with apheresis. As inquiries about RheoTherapy Centers began to reach the MDF's Dr. Filner, he began replying with factual descriptions of MDF's conclusions about this technique.

In January 1998, the State of Florida shut down the clinic for providing an unproven technique, but the clinic was subsequently allowed to reopen under stricter supervision, with a requirement that sales materials inform potential customers that the procedure is "experimental" (see a "Snippet" in the Spring 1998 *TBS Report*). Further state hearings are pending. In the meantime, the clinic sued MDF and Filner, alleging that his e-mail replies were defamatory and entitled the clinic to an injunction and punitive damages. The clinic has demanded that MDF "approve" the procedure, which MDF has had the courage to say is not supported

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Kepler: A *Skeptical* Mystic?

Johannes Kepler, the German astronomer who, in the early 1600s, first accurately described the revolution of the planets around the sun, had a mystical side that readers might find of interest. The following paragraph is from Morris Kline's *Mathematics: A Cultural Approach* (Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., Reading, Mass., 1962):

Kepler's scientific reasoning is fascinating. Like Copernicus, he was a mystic and, like Copernicus, he believed that the world was designed by God in accordance with some simple and beautiful mathematical plan. This belief dominated all his thinking. Kepler was also somewhat superstitious and, partly because he believed in astrology, at least as a youth, and partly because he was asked to make astrological predictions for his employers at Graz and at Prague, he spent many hours in that activity. To satisfy Emperor Rudolph he wrote a book entitled *On the More Certain Foundations of Astrology* (1602). Later in life he used to tell his clients in astrology, "What I say will or will not come to pass" and comforted himself over the loss of time devoted to the casting of horoscopes with the thought that just as nature had provided all animals with ways of acquiring food so God had provided astronomers with astrology. This daughter of astronomy, he said, nursed her mother.

You probably already knew that Kepler practiced astrology. But notice: In his later life, Kepler was enough of a skeptic that he prefaced his astrological reports with a proper disclaimer, which is better than many of our modern newspapers do! Also notice: In later life, Kepler may have practiced astrology without believing in it. Food for the table is a powerful motive, especially if one is bent on a divine mission — in this case, a scientific revolution.

—Jack Robinson

"Psychic/Prophet fails TBS Challenge" (from page 1)

After she was found to be wrong in the first two runs, Levy predicted — correctly — that she would be found to have gotten all the rest wrong as well. As tempted as we were to award her the prize for that "hit," we opted to adhere to the protocol and render the check "void."

Levy had initially contacted me after seeing a July 31 story about TBS on Orlando's Ch. 6 News. Following several telephone conversations and e-mails, we reached agreement on the protocol for the "\$1,000 Challenge." In an e-mail dated 9/3, Levy told me, "God will provide for this whole venture. I also finally saw the outcome of it today. I won't tell you what it is so I don't jinx it (Who knows? I could be wrong - it has happened before). . . . Am looking forward to this challenge . . ." It sure sounded like she expected to succeed. Yet, she was to claim after the event that she had known for many days that she would

fail.

Although she would have preferred to do what are known as "cold" readings, during the course of our negotiations I had explained that, unlike her claimed "psychometry" ability, the "success" of such readings are subject to interpretation and are simply not acceptable to TBS as the focus of a scientific test.

Nevertheless, following her unsuccessful performance, at Levy's request we videotaped her doing a reading in an effort to locate 7-year-old Amanda Brown, missing for about a week from her Tampa home. Working with a Tampa roadmap (from my car) and a newspaper photograph of the girl, Levy made the following predictions:

- Still alive (as of 4:00 p.m. Sept. 19) but not a pretty sight
- Will be found at night within 72 hours by a male policeman with dark hair; if no longer alive, she will be found dismembered; not in the water but on top of the water
- In an area located around a harbor named after a sand-piper, or "speckled harbor" — a harbor and a bird; "Harbor" is in the name of the place
- On roadmap, pointed to general area north of Rocky Point and south of Memorial Highway
- In a dark building made of old, brown, splintered wood, stained rather than painted; shaped like a trailer (long) but on the water (Amanda hears the water slapping)
- In a very small, dark room littered with beer cans, bottles and garbage; smells like pickles, fish and beer
- Rope burn marks on her wrists, right arm and stomach in a lot of pain, very hungry (given only some cheese), sexual abuse
- "Almost 100%" sure that the suspect (Willie Crain) is not involved in any way; perpetrator's nickname is "Mac" or name is "Mc something"; first name may be "Bob"; works alone; clean-cut and never caught before
- "I feel like she was picked up in a car in a public parking lot" near a grocery store or small strip mall
- "I believe that this reading is pretty accurate"

As for Levy's reading, Amanda had actually been noted missing one morning from the bed in which she, her mother and Crain had fallen asleep the night before. Crain, who had previously served time for child molestation, was subsequently arrested on Oct. 1 for Amanda's murder. Although still missing, blood matching Amanda's has been found on Crain's underwear and in his bathroom. The location of his mobile (not "brown wood") home is in Seffner, approx. 15 miles east of the area pinpointed by Levy, and nowhere near the water/waves.

In a 9/20 e-mail to friends/supporters (with copy to me), Levy had this to say about her performance at the TBS "\$1,000 Challenge" (although she didn't announce it at the event one day earlier):

No, I didn't win. I didn't want to. You guys were right. I thought I had to try anyways. Despite the odds.

Looks like the stress of the past three months, along with major oral surgery and medication four days before the challenge (along with five days of non-intentional fasting) proved to be more than I was capable of. Gee, I'm not Superwoman after all.

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Snippets

Tales of southwest Florida's "Skunk Ape" (see "Snippets," Winter 1997-98), also known as the Bigfoot of the Everglades, have caught the attention CBS-TV's *Unsolved Mysteries*. The program sent a crew of 10 to the Ochopee area for a four-day filming session centered around David Shealy, a self-styled expert on the purported 7-foot-tall, hairy beast with the noxious odor. Lest you smirk, Shealy has previously appeared on such authoritative TV shows as the E! Channel's *Talk Soup* and Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*. The *Unsolved Mysteries* story's supervising producer, Carol Dunn-Trussell, says that "If it's a hoax, that's what we'll expose it as." Here's your humble editor's "psychic" premonition: It is a hoax, and the *Unsolved Mysteries* program will *not* expose it as such.

(St. Pete. Times, Sept. 18;
Fort Myers News-Press, Oct. 10)

There may be more to the vampire legend than meets the tooth. According to a paper published in the prestigious medical journal *Neurology*, such tales may have their origins in a major European rabies epidemic of the 1700s. Dr. Juan Gomez-Alonso, a Spanish neurologist, says that he had always assumed vampires to be fictitious creatures. But one day as he watched a classic *Dracula* film "more as a doctor than as a spectator, I became so impressed by some obvious similarities between vampires and what happens in rabies, such as aggressiveness and hypersexuality." Indeed, the aversion of vampires to garlic and to mirrors may fit right in with this thesis. "Men with rabies . . . react to stimuli such as . . . odors or mirrors with spasms of the facial and vocal muscles that can cause hoarse sounds, bared teeth and frothing. . . . [In the past] a man was not considered rabid if he was able to stand the sight of his own image in a mirror."

(St. Pete. Times, Sept. 22)



And to complete our legendary-creature trifecta: A South Carolinian plans to spend \$1-million building a four-man submarine and scouring Scotland's Loch Ness, for the second time, in search of its elusive Monster. Using a home-made, one-man sub, Scott Taylor failed to locate the beast during a 1969 expedition sponsored by *World Book Encyclopedia*. He hopes to have better luck at the Loch next year in his newer and larger sub, named *Nessa*, which will be equipped with a harpoon-like projection with which to obtain a DNA sample from Nessie.

(AP via St. Pete. Times, Sept. 27)

Art Bell, whose popular *Coast to Coast* late-night radio program focuses on the bizarre, abruptly announced in early October that "What you are listening to is my final broadcast." His stated reason was "a threatening, terrible event" that purportedly happened to his family. But according to Lt. Bill Becht of the sheriff's department in Pahrump, Nevada, the town from which Bell broadcasts his show from a studio in his home, officers investigated and found no evidence of foul play relating to the family. Fortunately for the country's conspiracy-minded insomniacs, before the month was out, Bell had returned to the air — and not a moment too soon! As we report on p. 8, guest Richard Hoagland (in several appearances beginning on Oct. 30) has used the program to alert the world of the imminent arrival of an extraterrestrial spacecraft.

(St. Pete. Times, Oct. 14)

A survey, published in the Sept. 2 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, found that "alternative medicine" is now being taught in nearly two-thirds of traditional U.S. medical schools. 75 of the 117 responding schools either offer as elective courses, or include among the required curriculum, instruction in or about such therapies as chiropractic, acupuncture, herbal remedies, and mind-body medicine. David Spiegel, medical director of the Complementary Medicine Clinic at Stanford University Medical Center, says, "There has been sort of a sea change. Traditional doctors are seeing that people are voting with their feet and with their pocketbooks." Translation: If U.S. physicians wish to maintain their incomes, they had better not risk offending their "believing" patients by expressing criticisms of "alternative" therapies.

And on this theme: *TBS Report* has been informed that Andrew Skolnick, an associate editor of *JAMA* for many years, has recently been fired as a result of his articles critical of "alternative" medicine. It seems that they attracted too many lawsuits filed by unhappy practitioners. As Sagan and Randi have said (see p. 6), it does indeed appear that we are headed into another Dark Ages.

(AP via Tampa Tribune, Sept. 2)

And from our "It's Beside the Point Since People Are Voting for Alternative Medicine With Their Feet and Pocketbooks Anyway" Dept.: Two recent studies, published in the Oct. 8 *New England Journal of Medicine*, have concluded that undergoing chiropractic treatment may be little better than reading a pamphlet about back pain and is (gasp!) worthless against childhood asthma. Although "disappointed," Jerome McAndrews, a chiropractor and spokesperson for the American Chiropractic Association, has put the mother of all spin on the studies' results: "We are pleased at the attention that is being given to chiropractic's role in the health industry."

(Tampa Tribune, Oct. 8)

["Snippets" are derived from the referenced sources and rewritten by TBS's editor. Please send your clippings to TBS.]

"UFOs, Scientists and Stanford" (from page 1)

gress" in the UFO question. He further suggests that there is plenty of "substantial evidence" to support UFO claims. (Substantial? The results set forth in this study?) He concludes: "After all, how can one rationally object to a call for scientific examination of evidence?"

Good question, but somewhat beside the point. To my knowledge, no one is prohibiting good research scientists from examining any aspect of what SSE continually refers to as the "UFO problem." There are, of course, some interesting aspects of some UFO reports that point to unusual atmospheric/solar phenomena such as sundogs, sun pillars, superrefractive effects, and electrical "sprites" above thunderclouds. Ball lightning is still little understood. But do Dr. Haisch and the SSE believe that scientists should spend spare dollars and time running down reports of green lights chasing police cruisers, crashed aliens at Roswell, floating lights over Gulf Breeze, and the myriad other silly claims that together constitute the "UFO problem"? Give the scientific community some good non-prosaic "evidence" of UFOs, and there will be little problem in generating interest in a "scientific examination."

After reading through the Sturrock UFO report and the material available on the website for the SSE and its journal (<http://www.jse.com>), one is left with the impression that what really irks this group is its lack of credibility. It yearns for bigger research dollars and respect. Well, only one thing will achieve this — results. If SSE can ever report conclusively on a repeatable dowsing demonstration, fortune-telling result, reincarnation proof, alien visitation, or cold-fusion power, it can be assured that the scientific community and research dollars will clamor for position. But as long as SSE stays out on the edges of pseudoscience, the burden of proof and persuasion will always be upon it.

Ultimately, though, what's the harm in presenting this report to the public? It's a free country, and no one can question the right of this panel to present whatever results and conclusions it sees fit. It is, nonetheless, sad. The wide public has now heard reports that a group of "objective" scientists has concluded that "there's something to these UFO reports" and has urged fellow scientists to get serious about UFO investigations. The report itself is not nearly so credulous as the media would have it, but surely SSE and the Sturrock panel knew that this is how the report would be treated.

In a recent *Skeptical Inquirer* article, Glenn Sparks reported on studies of the influence media depictions of the paranormal have on the public ("Paranormal Depictions in the Media," Vol. 22, No. 4). In studying media reports of UFOs, he found that the greatest level of belief in UFOs was found in groups that were exposed to stories in which the reports were affirmed by a scientific authority. Amazingly, the next largest block of UFO believers was found in groups that read stories *discredited* by scientific authority. He concludes: "While the reason for this finding is not entirely clear, it may be that simply mentioning a scientific authority in a story about space aliens tends to lend some credibility to the topic —

regardless of what the scientist actually says" (p. 38).

There is little doubt that the Stanford/Sturrock UFO study will have such an effect on the public. In an age of scientific illiteracy, SSE and the Sturrock panel have done their part to assure us that more green lights will chase more cars, and more alien abductions will be reported. As James McGaha asked at CSICOP's "World Skeptics Congress" in Heidelberg, Germany, this past July, "Why fund mystery-mongering over UFOs, when NEOs (Near Earth Objects) are real threats in our skies that go almost totally unheeded?"

The late Richard Feynman, Nobel Prize winner and teacher at Cal Tech, once noted the lack of consistency regarding UFO reports as indicative of their unimportance: "It's not worth paying much attention to, unless it begins to sharpen up" (*The Meaning of It All*, 1998, p. 76). About true believers, he said, "They do not appreciate that the problem is not to demonstrate whether it's possible or not but whether it's going on or not."

Feynman struck at the heart of the self-created "UFO problem." If true believers and UFO aficionados, whether they be credentialed scientists or not, want the scientific community to pay attention to UFOs, they will need to "sharpen up" their own act and provide clear demonstration that flying saucers are not only possible, but that it's "going on." Until then, the "UFO problem" will remain mired in, as the panel noted, "ignorance and confusion." The Stanford/Sturrock panel should have done us all a favor by addressing itself to the UFO community, not the Associated Press.

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Several Extraordinary Medical Claims with (so far) Unextraordinary Evidence

In an Aug. 16 *Parade* magazine article, Dr. Isadore Rosenfeld claims that, during a visit to China about 20 years ago, he observed an open-heart operation performed without artificial respiration, and with the only anesthesia being an acupuncture needle (connected to an electrical source) in the patient's earlobe. Both his anecdote and his accompanying photo contain apparent incongruities that will be explored in an article that I am co-authoring with Dr. Wallace Sampson, editor of *The Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine* (more next issue).

Much more troubling is the controversy surrounding Dr. Judah Folkman's highly publicized findings of last year, when he reported the eradication of cancer in mice by the use of endostatin and angiostatin, which allegedly choked off the tumors' blood supply. It seems that the National Cancer Institute's efforts to replicate Dr. Folkman's results have been fruitless.

And an article in the Nov. 11 *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* offers statistical evidence to support this traditional Chinese technique for treating breech presentations in pregnancy: Burning herbs near the mother's foot to stimulate "acupoint BL 67" (located beside the outer corner of the 5th toenail). The resulting "increased fetal activity" increases the likelihood of attaining the proper head position for delivery. Unaddressed in the article is whether merely tickling the toe might be expected to have a similar effect.

—Gary P. Posner, M.D.

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS CONSULTANTS

Judith Becker Bryant, Ph.D.
University of South Florida (USF)
Psychology Dept., Tampa

Kenneth D. Hackmeyer, D.O.
Family and Environmental Medicine
Crystal River

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Tampa

James "The Amazing" Randi
Magician, author
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Daryl L. Schrader
Dept. of Mathematics
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USF Biology Dept.
Tampa

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Box 703 • Amherst, NY 14226
716-636-1425
info@csicop.org • www.csicop.org

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Published by the Skeptics Society
P.O. Box 338 • Altadena, CA 91001
818-794-3119
skeptmag@aol.com
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by Philip J. Klass
404 "N" St., S.W. • Wash., DC 20024

• James Randi Educ. Foundation •

201 S.E. Davie Blvd. • Ft. Lauderdale, FL
33316-1815 • 954-467-1112
randi@randi.org • www.randi.org

Randi speaks in St. Pete.

James Randi was the featured speaker at the Dr. Carl Edward Sagan Memorial Dinner hosted by the Humanist Association of St. Petersburg on November 7 at Pepe's restaurant in St. Petersburg. Randi made a very witty, yet at the same time intense, speech about Dr. Sagan's contribution to human progress, sharing many anecdotes from their long friendship.

Like Sagan, Randi, too, is convinced that we are unfortunately headed towards a second Dark Ages. He compared an earlier manuscript of Sagan's last book, *The Demon Haunted World*, to the final, published version, pointing out how Sagan ended up expressing his views much more forcefully, without academic hedging and diplomacy, in the final version, as if he had known that it would be his last opportunity to make a strong stand for critical thinking and skepticism.

Randi concluded with "Let us go forth and continue his work with diligence," and encouraged his listeners to be inspired by the motive, "I think Carl would like me to say this . . ."

—Valerie Grey

Posner and "psychic" on Kathy Fountain's show

Gary Posner and "psychic" Donna Jean Guerrero were Kathy Fountain's guests on the Nov. 9 edition of *Your Turn*, which airs from 12:25 to 1:00 during Ch. 13's noon newscasts. The topic of discussion was how not to get ripped off by phony psychics.

While Donna Jean offered pointers to help viewers distinguish between the "good" and the "bad" in the business, Posner noted that no one has yet been able to conclusively demonstrate psychic ability under proper observing conditions.

Posner brought with him a box, and announced that if anyone

in the studio (i.e., Donna Jean), or in the viewing audience, was able to "psychically" determine its contents, he would award a prize of \$1,000. No callers made the attempt, nor did Donna Jean.

Both during and after the program, Fountain expressed her desire to assist in setting up a TBS "1,000 Challenge" with Donna Jean, to be conducted behind the scenes one morning at the studio, with the results to be divulged live that afternoon on her show. Posner immediately accepted, but Donna Jean remains somewhat non-committal. We'll see . . .

TBS gets credit on Stossel show

As noted in our last issue, TBS responded to a call from an assistant to ABC-TV News' John Stossel regarding Florida "psychic detective" John Monti. As a result, Stossel's powerfully skeptical Oct. 6 special, *The Power of Belief*, covered Monti's involvement in an ongoing missing-person case in Denton, Texas. As the closing credits rolled, TBS (along with several other skeptical sources) received a "Special Thanks."

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"Scientist sued" (from p. 2)

by the scientific evidence. The battle is now between the right of a non-profit foundation and its scientists to review and comment publicly on medical procedures of this type, and the clinic's transparent attempt to silence those who raise questions.

Victims of AMD are entitled to full and honest information about unproven therapies. Court hearings are pending which will test these issues. Hopefully the winners will be not only MDF and Dr. Filner, but also all of those who raise questions. Such skeptical inquiry is, after all, the very essence of what science is all about.

Letters • Readers' Forum

Editor: I'm finally getting around to complimenting you on the quality of the TBS website. It's an excellent site with many fun corners to explore, and I've tucked it into my "favorites" file.

Many thanks for a job well done!

Alan McBride
Florida's Radio Network, Orlando
charlamagne@mindspring.com

Editor: At our most recent TBS meeting, the afternoon event with the testing of Virginia Levy was superb. Everyone was more than friendly, hospitable, open and fair towards our psychic challenger guest. I hope we have many more events just like this one.

However, I was very annoyed by the way the morning session went. I realize that the humanist/atheist groups and TBS have overlapping memberships. On occasion, though, the humanists/atheists seem to forget which meeting they are attending. I don't mind when they make their announcements or hand out literature, but when they start taking over the meeting, I feel that my time is being wasted.

In many respects, humanists/atheists and rational Christians are natural allies against much of the New Age nonsense. Remember what Virginia Levy said about how each of us has our own reality? At least we can agree that reality is external to ourselves, and we can't make it up as we go. God exists or doesn't exist completely independently of how we feel about it.

I don't mind being a minority theist in the Tampa Bay Skeptics. However, since TBS's meetings are not supposed to be indistinguishable from the humanist/atheist meetings, I hope that we can spend our future meetings more productively, as we have in the past.

Alan L. Soli, St. Petersburg
solial@eckerd.edu

Editor: So glad I found your home page. I've been working with various skeptics for years, but since moving

to Florida 10 years ago, I have not been active. My special interest, besides trying to educate people out of the Dark Ages, has been the creation/evolution debate. I'm a former high school and college teacher and now a government scientist — but don't hold that against me! I plan to attend the next TBS meeting in December.

Great site — keep up the good work!

Joseph King, Winter Haven
aufwuch2@webtv.net

Editor: You were too nice to the "psychic" on Kathy Fountain's show on Nov. 9 (see p. 6). You had the box and the grand. You should have challenged her then and there.

The lady was a bit put off and didn't quite know what to do with you sitting there. The look on her face was something else.

Overall a darn good performance, and I hope Kathy has you back. It would be nice to see a formal challenge attempted.

Allen Downard, Lakeland
74744.2026@compuserve.com

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"Psychic/Prophet fails TBS Challenge" (from page 3)

No excuses, just observations. Just the facts.

Well, there goes my membership with the "Men in Black"!

For the record, here are the results of the TBS "\$1,000 Challenge" with Virginia Levy:

| Run | Selection | Result |
|-----|-----------|--------|
| 1 | 6 | 10 |
| 2 | 2 | 5 |
| 3 | 8 | 6 |
| 4 | 7 | 5 |
| 5 | 9 | 8 |
| 6 | 5 | 7 |

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V11N3



Announcing...

Press and
Public
Welcome

Tampa Bay Skeptics Quarterly Meetings

3rd Saturday of every March, June, September,
and December (barring unforeseen conflicts)

Our next meeting will be:

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19 --- 10:30 A.M. - 1:30 P.M.
MARTIN LUTHER KING ROOM (2ND FLOOR)
PUBLIC LIBRARY, 900 N. ASHLEY DRIVE, TAMPA

Scheduled: Open Forum, video of media coverage
of the paranormal, and other fun stuff

Followed by optional lunch and "spirited" conversation
at the Village Inn on N. Dale Mabry near Kennedy Blvd.

Note: Parking is available in adjacent garage with 2nd floor
covered walkway to library. If attendant attempts to charge
the "event" price, explain that you are going to the library.

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Warning: ET probe to land on Dec. 7!

In a Nov. 6 e-mail to the members of Citizens Against
UFO Secrecy (CAUS), director/attorney Peter Gersten
warned that an alien craft is scheduled to land on earth just
days after publication of this newsletter. It seems that
Richard Hoagland (www.enterprisemission.com), the
chief promoter of such claims as the "Face on Mars," has
stated on the Art Bell radio program that a so-called "EQ
Pegasi signal" is emanating from an interstellar probe
which will land near Phoenix, AZ, on Dec. 7.

Says Gersten, "CAUS believes we must assume
Hoagland's information, based upon his experience,
expertise and intuition and corroborated by his calcu-
lations and Pentagon sources, is reliable and accurate.
CAUS believes we must prepare for some unusual event
to take place north of Phoenix on December 7th." The web
address for CAUS is <http://caus.org>.

== Visit TBS's Award-Winning Website ==

<http://members.aol.com/tbayskept/tbs.html>

If for no other reasons, check out the web versions of
our *TBS Report* articles for their related **links** and for the
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due to space constraints. To find out at a glance about any
significant additions/changes since your last visit, click on
"**What's New on the Site**" at the top of the Home Page.

And, if you haven't already done so, be sure to send
us your **e-mail address** (to garypos@aol.com) so that we
may add you to our electronic **TBS Update Service**.

TBS and James Randi "Psychic" Challenges

Tampa Bay Skeptics has a standing **\$1,000** offer for
verifiable scientific proof of any paranormal phenomenon.

James "The Amazing" Randi has secured pledges
totaling more than **\$1,000,000** for the first person able to
successfully demonstrate paranormal power for him.

These monetary rewards, and a place in history, await
the first successful candidates. All UFOlogists, psychics,
astrologers, dowsers, and the like are encouraged to come
forward and offer your proof (see the "\$\$\$ Challenges"
page on the TBS web site, or contact us for more details).

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FIRST CLASS
Holiday Season and
New Year!**

